The Board Plans
IC 36-12-3-4

The board has no job more important than long-range planning for the library. The library board is responsible to set the broad parameters within which the library will operate, and you haven't done that if you don't have a long-range plan in place.

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- The long-range plan will be the basis for many other board functions.
- The board writes policies based on the mission statement and long-range goals.
- The board prioritizes the use of library resources through a plan.
- The board sets the stage for programs and services through a plan.
- Staff, director and board stay on the same track with a mission and plan.
- The board monitors progress of the library with the goals.
- The board maintains accountability to the community through the plan.

*Planning
is an
exercise
of leadership*

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Long-range planning must be much more than an informal discussion about what the library ought to be doing in the years ahead. Good planning has to follow a very orderly and formal process.

Your board should hold at least one long-range planning meeting per year. This meeting will include the director and other key staff and be used to write a long-range plan or modify the existing goals.

You should be ready to merge your personal goals for the library with the personal goals of the rest of the board team.   You should also be ready to work for a consensus with the rest of the plan-

*Long-range
planning
is a formal
process*

ning team about the goals that you will set for the library. A library must have only one set of long-range goals to shoot for.

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The annual long-range planning session will probably include the board, director, staff and other resource people and last as long as one or even two days.

In that special planning meeting you should be ready to set aside the limitations that you struggle with monthly in your board meetings. You will be asked to dream about the future of the library and then plan how you will make those dreams reality over the next three to five years.

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An action-oriented long-range plan is so much more than a statement of the philosophies of the board about how the library will operate. The final plan you approve should...

• <u>be truly long-range</u>. Planning for next year is not long-range. Your plan should include at least the next three to five years. The goals you set should be broad enough and visionary enough that they will take some time to complete. Your director and staff will then build their annual objectives for the library based on your long-range goals. Note: If your library is participating in the Universal Service Fund discounts and the technology plan for the library is part of the long range plan, the long range plan will need to be for three years. If the technology plan is a separate document, the long range plan can be for up to five years. It is not recommended that a long range plan be for more than five years.

• <u>be flexible</u>. It is a common misconception that a long-range plan, once written, is locked into place and not changed. Consider your library's long-range plan a flexible and changeable document.

When you review your plan six months or a year after you write the goals and objectives, one of your tasks will be to modify the plan as necessary to reflect changes that have occurred in the library since you wrote the original plan. If you planned to remodel a building in three years, you may discover that a sudden increase in revenues allows you to remodel now. Or you may discover that a sudden

shortfall of revenues forces you to extend your objective a couple of years. Keep the goal and change the objective.

• have accountability. Every objective you write should be measurable so that you can tell if it was completed or not. Each goal will then have objectives or action plans that will be specific, time-limited and spell out a responsible party for completion of the objectives or actions described.

Note the sample goal and its objective with specific accountability. Goal: To seek additional non-tax funding for library materials. Objective: Within five years our library will have an endowment fund that contributes to the library an amount equal to at least 10 percent of the annual materials budget."

• be visionary. Long-range planning means thinking big. That's tough for library boards struggling with paying the bills and keeping the doors open, but a plan without vision is worse than no plan at all. Vision requires you to forget the budget constraints for at least a little while and dream about what your library could be. Vision and progress always requires some risk, but you can't steal second with your foot on first.

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A plan for planning

The mission statement is the first step in long-range planning. Your library has a mission that should be in writing, stating clearly the reason the library exists and the vision that the board holds for the future of the library.

The mission statement is not a fuzzy piece of philosophy, but a clear statement of where this library wants to go. It states the difference this library will make by its existence. The mission statement is the cornerstone around which all other planning for the library takes place.

After you have the current mission statement reviewed or a new statement written, you should take a hard look at where your library is right now.   This self-examination should look at strengths and weaknesses of the library, opportunities for the library and threats to the continued operation of the library.

Your self-examination should also look at the external influences that impact the library. Your community is important. You will

need a strategy for researching your community's needs, e.g., what social conditions will have an impact? What will the current political climate do to your library? Is there competition for your programs and services? How will the economy and the demographics of your community affect your library? What are the trends among libraries?

When you have a clear picture of where your library is right now, it's time to write goals. Goals will grow out of the results of your self-examination. Goals should take advantage of opportunities, build on strengths, correct weaknesses, and prepare for threats to the library.

A good plan will limit the number of goals to a handful. Then, if you write 5-10 objectives each year, you'll have enough to do. Remember, planning is an ongoing process and you'll be back next year to add to your plan.

To carry the goals into action, you should assign responsibility for each goal to either a standing committee of the board or to a special action task force. The committees and task forces are then responsible to write action strategies to make the goal happen.

For example, a goal to make all library facilities accessible to handicapped persons should have a clear list of objectives and actions necessary to complete the goal. The committees might decide they need a feasibility study of facilities, a cost estimate of the renovations and a plan for raising the necessary cash. Those actions are assigned a completion date and a person or persons responsible for completion.

Get help to do your planning

Planning for Results: A Public Library Transformation Process. 2 Vols.

The Guidebook and the How-to-Manual.
Ethel Himmel and William James Wilson with the Revision Committee of the Public Library Association. 1998.

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Good planning sometimes requires an outside perspective to keep the team on target and productive. An outside facilitator can force the team to be objective and write clear goals. College staff, corporate planners and other professionals can help you write a good plan.

The Public Library Association has published *Planning for Results,* a planning process for public libraries that includes a guidebook and a how-to manual for planning. *Planning for Results* emphasizes the connection between needs that exist in a community and the services that a library offers. Libraries using this planning process should select among thirteen service responses for focus during the planning cycle and identify resource allocations for these services. The service responses describe most of the services offered

by public libraries:

- Basic Literacy
- Business and Career Information
- Commons
- Community Referral
- Consumer Information
- Cultural Awareness
- Current Topics and Titles
- Formal Learning Support
- General Information
- Government Information
- Information Literacy
- Lifelong Learning
- Local History and Genealogy

Since *Planning for Results* is a planning process specifically for public libraries, it can be a valuable guide for your planning. The following brief overview of that process summarizes the major steps for long-range planning recommended by the document.

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PLANNING FOR RESULTS

Steps and Planning Tasks

Products

PREPARE: Planning to Plan

1. Read Planning for Results
2. Estimate level of effort, set planning timetable, develop budget
3. Prepare to keep people informed
4. Select planning committee
5. Orient planning committee

1. A "plan to plan."
2. Appointed and oriented planning committee, representative of the community and library stakeholders

ENVISION: Imagining the Future

6. Articulate a community vision
7. Scan the community
8. Identify community needs
9. Scan the library
10. Determine the needs the library will address
11. Write the library vision statement

1. Review of community conditions
2. Four to six community vision statements
3. Review of library conditions
4. Six to eight library vision statements

STEPS AND PLANNING TASKS	PRODUCTS

DESIGN: Inventing the Future

12. Select service responses
13. Write the library mission statement

1. Understanding of the 13 options for achieving the library vision (Service Responses)
2. Three to five Service Responses identified as those the library will emphasize
3. Mission statement that communicates your Services Responses (priorities) to the community

BUILD: Assembling the Future

14. Set goals
15. Review measurement and evaluation techniques
16. Develop an array of objectives
17. Select objectives

1. One to three goals written for each selected Service Response
2. An understanding of three measurement methods for libraries
3. One to four measurable objectives you can use to measure progress towards each goal

IMPLEMENT: Moving into the Future

18. Determine available resources
19. Identify activities
20. Revisit your choices

1. Understanding of resources needed to reach your goals and how you will get resources
2. List of activities you can accomplish within your resources that you will undertake to reach your goals

COMMUNICATE: Informing the Stakeholders

21. Complete the draft plan
22. Obtain final approval
23. Publish and distribute the final plan

1. Understanding of the political issues that may affect approval
2. A final plan, available to the public in languages and formats they need